



**Kai Kelley Jr.**  
*Event & Program Support Coordinator*

Hello, my name is Kai Kelley Jr., and I'm a new employee in the Career Center department of Student Affairs. My first day of work was scheduled on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and the unfolding of the COVID-19 global pandemic drastically impacted any sort of normalcy around starting as a new hire. According to my team's manager Anne Lyford, I'm the first Student Affairs employee in history to start and be onboarded remotely.

The majority of my new employee tasks were completed using online platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, and Microsoft Teams. Though they helped foster an interim form of connectedness between colleagues and team members. I still held expectancy for the day I could build relationships with people face-to-face. Traditional firsts like attending orientation, meeting colleagues from across campus, or enjoying the welcoming vibes of a staff-meeting breakfast were unsafe and dangerous to conduct. There seemed to be this whirlwind of governments and institutions all at once, catching up to the presence of the pandemic. My own

excitement of beginning as a new professional in student affairs was subject to new safety guidelines that made remote working environments a new normal for the foreseeable future. I was excited, nonetheless, to start and begin learning the role's responsibilities, and how the Career Center department supported the mission of Student Affairs at Duke.

Working remotely was a new challenge. My training became this hybridized experience of learning how to contribute to what felt like rapid-fire brainstorming sessions and creating and thinking innovatively about student and employer resources. That pace was often-times determined by weekly or even hourly updates from staff, students, companies, professional associations, and institutional leadership in response to the development of the pandemic. Typical seasonal office planning was requiring a complete virtual overhaul of how Career Center teams offered services, and it was all hands on deck to keep those offerings afloat. I was seeing in real time the role of Student Affairs and how it manages its institutional responsibilities and weighing the reactionary versus responsive take on being able to provide and protect students and staff. COVID-19 made my new beginning in Student Affairs unique, giving me a wild story to share and look back upon.